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**THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER**

That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . . *James Connolly*

WHAT ECONOMIC CRISIS?



A LIMERICK STREET MUSICIAN

MISLEADING CASES

IF IT'S ON, it's on the *Limerick Leader*. Relying on the promise in the paper's house advertisement, I am looking forward to a £5 ticket for the Scarteen Hunt (The Black and Tans) Ball so that I can shake a leg (perhaps, appropriately, in a foxtrot) among the exempt-from-Income-Tax and otherwise disadvantaged farmers who'll be packing the Oyster Ballroom at Dromkeen later this month. Of course, this is only one of the many attractions offered in the paper to people who are able to keep their end up and are not contributing to the slump in Limerick cabaret reported in the same issue. Some faint-hearts are no longer going out two or three nights weekly and have, I read, opted for only one night at cabaret. Let me quote from the Buckley Nightspot Correspondent:

They found that even one night out was expensive. Take a husband and wife for example. Their expenses would run something like this: Admission £1.50; taxi fares £1.20; alcohol £3.50. That is a total of £6.20 — a nice tidy sum for an evening out.

For couples who have not shirked going out three nights a week it adds up to an even tidier sum, indeed a nicer, tidier sum. Of course, there's always the chance to opt for the G.A.A.'s 2 a.m. frolic to the music of Dan and The Farmers (Dan? Dan Ryan, the full employment man?), or drag me to The Paddocks to buy some of those fat and forward bullocks (and make sure you spell that right!) on which the plain people of Ireland and Miss Buckley depend.

THERE ARE other advertisements in the Buckley ninepenny: Revision of Postal and Telegraph Charges — 'revision' in Civil Service-ese means they've gone up again! A letter is now 9p; a trunk call, a mere three minutes, to London to see if it's the Provos, the Officials or just the Unofficials who've blown the legs off your son is near enough to 15 old shillings. The Limerick Gas Company does not use the word 'revision'; its advertisement says "the price of gas will be adjusted by 5p per therm". Adjusted, in case you don't know, means raised. What product of Munchin's or Mungret thought that one up? Some half-educated moron I've no doubt. Why everyone, before Education and Cabaret enveloped the country, knew precisely where they stood when a farmer said, "Pigs is riz!"

Other items in the *Leader* are interesting more for what they don't say rather than what they do. For instance, Cunnanes the Gas Men, of Foynes, recommend you to switch from petrol at 75.7p a gallon to gas at 40p; they don't tell you the capital cost of the conversion, the mileage of gas-running *vis-a-vis* petrol, or whether you need a trailer filled with gas containers to take you to Dublin and back. For the small saver there are the catch-me adverts: the 13½ per cent fixed monthly income plan of Irish Credit Bank, of O'Connell Street, Limerick, and the more modest 11½ per cent withdrawal-on-demand of Bowmaker. Take it from me, and I've done my stint on the *Financial Times*, that pink Bible of Mammon, that your capital is at risk in both these institutions. To pay that kind of interest they have to lend at a higher rate — to speculative builders, would-be supermarketiers, haulage men and other chancers who can't raise the wind at Allied Irish or the Bank of Ireland. Of course, the bank will pay your interest; while depositors continue to deposit. They'll pay you out of the new deposits! In a slump — and it is beginning — they'll just be unable to pay and it won't be much use looking to the well-heeled Miss Buckley for satisfaction.

ANOTHER straightforward way of throwing money away is to put it in the Irish Permanent Building Society which offers 8

BY DERMOT MCEVOY

per cent tax-free "equals 12.3 per cent gross" and whose Limerick manager is D. Morrissey-Murphy (shades of Geoghegan-Quinn T.D.!). With inflation at 25 per cent, the full-rate taxpayer is getting a *negative* interest rate of up to 13 per cent, *that is minus 13 per cent*. But, worse, about 70 per cent of building society "savings" are held by the over-55 age group who are on the books for only about 3.5 per cent of mortgage borrowing. So as a group they incur about two-thirds of the total losses due to inflation. Correspondingly, the under-55's make an equal gain. Analyst John Foster of *The Guardian*, recently assessing this situation in Britain, says:

Considering both the aged and low income groups together, the typical loser from inflation is the non-taxpaying pensioner and the typical recipient the young high-earning owner-occupier — a specific movement from the needy to the less needy.

Now, let anyone who is paying a mortgage to a building society test the truth of my assertion that he is being subsidised by the old and the needy — with the connivance of the building societies — by calculating what *proportion* of his present income is paid out in mortgage repayments this year compared with 1973. Finally, I defy the building societies to contradict this statement: that in their efforts to attract funds through advertising, specifically the *Limerick Leader*, they have persistently misled the public as to the *real* return and security yielded by building society savings. Furthermore, as non-profit making institutions they are uniquely placed to introduce the necessary reforms to protect their savers from inflation through the indexation of interest payments, that is, simply by tying the interest rate to the cost of living.

In this indexation, the Government has made a small start in its new savings schemes. How about you, Mister D. Morrissey Hyphen Murphy? And how about you, Miss Buckley, getting someone to write intelligibly and honestly in your paper. There was a time when the paper was run in the public interest rather than for private greed; today, it is best described by the film advertised for the Movieland Cinema at Roxboro, 'A Pain in the A...' — and I didn't invent that one.

IT IS with relief that I turn to the campaign inaugurated by your local Boy Scout, Mayor Thady. To stop young people drinking, he is seeking the help of the Limerick Licensed Vintners Association. While I find his choice of ally odd, even eccentric, I am prepared to go along. I'd like though to use his influence to persuade the Jesuit fathers to accept less than a quarter of a million pounds for Mungret so that Limerick boys and girls would have somewhere decent to meet; it is the lack of such youth centres that usually drives the youngsters to the pubs. Not only the youngsters, but their fathers.

Moreover, drink could be banned in the Mayor's Parlour (no, not even for Steve!) and Thady would get a good press, especially in the *Daily Mirror*. There is, of course, a snag: Limerick youth, still on the dole, might be so clear-headed from all this sobriety that, come election time, they might decide not to vote for a chancer, upright Boy Scout, or speechless elder. But, seriously, heavy drinking is endemic in Ireland, the national escape-route from facing the problems of the day: it distorts the outlook, makes people squeal at

another 2p for a stamp yet accept supinely a half-a-dozen pence on the lounge-bar pint. (Not that a fairly consistent teetotaller like myself isn't mulcted—34p for two half-pints of lemonade at a Dublin 'Spotted Dog'. It would almost drive you to drink!).

What a different Ireland we would have if just the working men and women (bugger the others!) took Big Jim Larkin's advice and stayed out of the boozers. Sadly, he used to tell me that it was over-fondness of the pint that kept the worker down, not the machinations of the William Martin Murphys; he had no doubt that a united, sober working class would soon put paid to the bosses. Even Jim's own burly lieutenant, Barney Conway, drank too much, not that Jim ever said an unkind word to him, but sadness lined his face when I'd go to see him at WUI headquarters in Cathedral Street while Barney would be at Phil Shanahan's a few doors away indulging in the national drug.

Have things changed since? Yes, for the worse. More and more people are drinking more and more; more families are being deprived, more babies battered, more lives blighted. And, a new one on me: *Midnight Mass* at St. Michael's, Dunlaoghaire, this Christmas started in a not overful church at 10 p.m. so that it would not be invaded by drunks at pub-closing time, drunks who saw the First Mass to celebrate Christ's birth as an easy way of fulfilling their obligation to attend Mass on Christmas Day. Holy Ireland, holy smoke! *It all goes to confirm my view that of those who still believe in God, nearly all, in Ireland at any rate, behave as if they do not.* The Christian religion is just make-believe with the vast majority. Consider the way they behave, their lack of charity, but, above all their hypocrisy, their readiness to throw up their hands in horror at a politician who says simply that he is agnostic. They are practising atheists in the sense that they ignore God and have not a spark of charity in their carcasses.

LAST MONTH, I quoted Bishop Hanson, Professor of Theology at Manchester University, and referred, *en passant*, to the Irish Constitution's gratuitous insult to Unitarians of whom the Rev. Saville Hicks was leader and who was generous with the Guinness when we would discuss religion and, often, less weighty subjects. Thanking me for the *Limerick Socialist*, Bishop Hanson (I don't know of what denomination, but almost certainly the wrong reverend as against the right reverend in a South of Ireland aspect) writes: "Your article amused and interested me. The trouble with Saville Hicks was that he poured rather too many Guinneses in his house and elsewhere". Charity, My Lord Bishop, charity!

THEN there was the Christmas gift I got from John Dunstan, a colleague on the *Financial Times* who used to juggle with foreign currencies (perhaps it's cowrie shells now?). Knowing my interest in the French Revolution, he sent me a napkin he'd swiped from Le Procope, the cafe founded in 1686 in the Rue Mazarin, Paris, where Voltaire, Danton, Robespierre, Diderot and all that great company met to discuss literature and life. Supply your own bloodstains, he wrote. I'm having Alan Corsini, a Dublin artist, copy the lettering of the cafe's commemorative plaque and will have it all framed as soon as I can get suitable blood. Perhaps the *Leader's* Cabaret Correspondent will direct me to a truly patrician source at the Scarteen Ball? No one in trade, of course; I'll bring my own hatchet.

FINALLY, I find that an old friend, Arthur La Bern (a former colleague on the London *Evening Standard* and author of the best-selling "It Always Rains On Sundays") is researching a new life of Robert Emmet. I've been able to help him with some memorabilia, including a description of the handsome silver cup which the grateful burgesses of Dublin presented to the lieutenant of Dragoons who so promptly captured the

bould Robert and supervised his hanging. The cup is in an antique dealer's in Dublin. By the way, next time you hear someone singing that piece about Robert's loved one, Sarah Curran, "She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps and lovers around her are sighing &c", just bear in mind that this is all Irish hooey. Within a short time of Robert getting topped, Sarah took off for England and married. Sensible girl. And who did she marry? Why a real steady fellow, a British officer!

Writing in the *Irish Times*, La Bern tells of his attendance at the funeral service in London of Dr. Gordon Hamilton-Fairley, the 45-year-old distinguished cancer specialist who had his legs blown off by an IRA bomb planted in his car. He calls his murderers a disgrace to "all the brave men who have died in Ireland's historically irrefutable cause" and concludes a moving elegy:

When Ireland takes her rightful place among the nations she will be ashamed of them. They will be a bad memory, as obscene as the Orange Lodges themselves. But then Limerick City Council, Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and so-called Labour, will have none of that. Why, that's political. Backboneless bastards.

ALDERMAN PAT*

BY MICHAEL HOGAN, THE BARD OF THOMOND

A reply to a Pork-Merchant/Alderman who told the author he'd rather have a pig's head than his genius.

Said Alderman Pat, "'tis all round my hat
Your intellect local or native,
I'd rather be fed on a salty pig's head
Than possessed of your genius creative".

"'Tis true", said the Bard, "you feel kindred regard
For the head of your grovelling brother;
Swine's flesh to your maw is but animal-law,
Since brutes love to feed on each other.

There are beasts in men's shape, from the ass to the ape.
We know them as Nature's base coin;
Yet Fortune can make a more spurious mistake
In an Alderman forged from a swine.

Nature plays pranks on all from the hut to the hall
And her work never gives her the lie;
But when Fortune makes pigs cut Aldermen's rigs,
'Twould be well they'd remain in the sty".

* Though these verses were written by Michael Hogan about a hundred years ago, their recent public reading in Limerick evoked an immediate and lively response from the audience, who recognised in "Alderman Pat" similar characteristics to those of a Fine Gael member of the present Limerick City Council of the same name. Appropriately enough, the modern Alderman Pat, like his undistinguished predecessor, knows more about a pig's head than about the Bard's creative genius.

Price increase

With this issue the price of the "Limerick Socialist" goes up from 8p to 10p. We regret the increase but if the paper is to continue to be published this decision is a vital necessity. Over the past year paper and printing costs have continued to rise and from this month postal charges have again been increased. The annual subscription is also going up from £1.50 to £2. We hope our readers and supporters will understand and accept the reasons for this action. We are confident that we can rely on their continued support for the paper in the forthcoming year.

**PART
THIRTEEN**

**BY
P. J. RYAN**

RELIGIOUS AND MUSICAL RAIDS

On the fifteenth of May 1922, a truck stopped outside a shop in Patrick Street where religious goods were on display in the window. A party of men descended from the truck and viewed the many objects of religious design with pious devotion. Drawing their guns they entered the shop. They informed the proprietor that they were commandeering the many items on display.

They removed statues and pictures of many Christian saints, including St. Christopher the traveller and St. Patrick himself. A statue of Paddy Sarsfield was not overlooked. Religious medals, badges and beads in boxes found their way into the parked truck. The story of this religious raid caused some disquiet amongst the citizens until it was pointed out that "these are saintly men who do not neglect their religion".

Another shop was entered where buckets, enamel mugs and plates were signed for and removed. It has been shown that Limerick was a musically-minded city. In the chaos following the departure of the British and the disappearance of law and order, the charms of music were not forgotten.

A music shop in O'Connell Street was entered by armed men who removed fiddles which the manager insisted on calling violins. Accordeons and molodeons and other musical instruments were likewise removed. The manager laughed when two men sat down at some pianos. He was greatly surprised when they started to play. Tears came to his eyes when with heavy hobnailed boots tapping the dainty pedals, one man played that heart-rending romantic air, "Let Erin Remember". His tears were dried and his eyes flashed fire as the other pianist with heavy boots crashed out that stirring martial air, "The Minstrel Boy". The Poet Moore, who first played the air on a piano, would have smiled approval. Satisfied with the tone of the instruments, the removal squad went into action and the pianos were removed.

As the horse-drawn float with the pianos moved up the street, the manager remarked: "The Minstrel Boy to the war is gone and my grand pianos with him".

The bacon factories, the flour mills and goods stores at the Docks were entered and lorry loads of goods removed. In all these things the gun and the official receipt were sufficient authority.

Clothing shops were entered and lorry loads of clothing, boots, trench coats and caps removed. Overcoats, whether expensive or cheap, were as welcome in the heat of summer as on any winter's day. As the lorries charged up the streets, trench-coated men sat astride the booty, waving their rifles in exuberant display.

THE CASTLE "GHOST"

Seeing all these things happening, the citizens feared that the city was about to undergo a long and bloody siege. Long memories retold the tales of horror of 1691. Some few resourceful citizens gave kindly thought to the needs of the many. It was discovered that a brick can break a plate-glass window. Many broken windows proved the truth of this discovery. Prudent forethought prompted many people to help themselves to all those provisions which a household might need during a siege. In this manner many shops were emptied of their stocks.

A boat at the Docks was boarded and six new Ford cars were removed and taken to the New Barracks where they became staff cars. Men who had never rode in anything grander than a donkey cart, could now enjoy the pleasures of motoring in the grand manner of the landed gentry.

Most of the goods commandeered in the city were stored in

The Fourth Siege of Limerick

the four military barracks. It must not be thought that the men in the barracks were dishonest. Every citizen has heard of "Drunken Thady and the Bishop's Lady". The Bard of Thomond has given an exacting account of the affair. That the "Lady" should pay a return visit to the scene of her former joys caused no surprise to the citizens. On three consecutive nights in the Castle Barracks the ghostly lady appeared on the ramparts connecting the two towers facing the river. She always appeared after midnight; it was noted the tide was always out when the ghost appeared. The story, coupled with her appearance, caused terror in the Castle and none would dare fire on the unholy spirit lest evil should befall them. A recruit from the country hearing of the ghost, expressed derision, contempt and disbelief in the story. He accepted a challenge to go on sentry duty at two that night. At about half past two the ghost appeared on the rampart. The impious unbeliever promptly fired a bullet from a mauser rifle at the bulky figure, with amazing results. With a bellow of pain, the sheet-covered ghost collapsed in a cascade of flour which he had carried to the ramparts to lower to accomplices on the river bank below. It is clear from this that if the commander in the Castle was dishonest, there would be no need for this subterfuge to loot the hardwon stores.

An army is tied by its purse strings — no money, no army. The science of logistics includes the paymaster with his bag of notes and the quartermaster with his requisition form — "Please supply".

Again, the Diehards had no money and therefore no paymaster. A competent military commander can surmount these little problems of logistics by intelligent disposition of his forces. It was a simple matter to create a paymaster with instructions to do his act. The correct action having been taken, the newly created paymaster with two assistant paymasters left the New Barracks and arrived at the Munster & Leinster Bank in O'Connell Street. They arrived in that status symbol of the day, a new model T. Ford car. When they arrived, some groups of men in trench coats who had been loitering around, lined up at the bank door, apparently forming a guard of honour. Some of them entered the bank with the paymaster and his staff. An eyewitness who was in the manager's office seeking an extension of an overdraft, which he failed to obtain, gave the following account of events.

Three men entered the manager's office with drawn guns. The manager received them courteously, affably asking: "Could he help them?" The leader said: "No! They would help themselves. They wanted some money to pay their men, nearly a thousand armed men. They wanted money instantly, all that he had in the bank". The manager demurred pointing out that a thousand pounds should be ample to pay the men. Being a conscientious man and anxious to keep down expenses, he suggested that if they called back later, he would have the money made up in pay envelopes, putting the right amount into each packet. He added that as they seemed to have but a primary education, they would scarcely be able to count up to a thousand. A thousand pounds, he reminded them, is a large sum of money, not easy to come by in these troubled times.

Incensed at the suggestion of illiteracy, the leader rapped his gun on the desk, and then put the muzzle in a comfortable position against the manager's ribs. He explained in some heat

that all three had received a good secondary education from the Christian Brothers, having a Pass with Honours in their final exams. Not only could they count up to a thousand, they could count up to a million; but as they were in a hurry they would count up to three and if the manager did not then open up the safes, they would open him up.

The matter being thus clarified and expedited, the raiders then helped themselves. Knowing that their need was great they did not stint their efforts but helped themselves to the great abundance.

They sneered at thrift and damned all parsimony. The amount taken was around thirty thousand pounds, a large sum of money, not easy to come by in those troubled times.

On leaving the bank, the paymaster and his staff were met by the guard of honour with drawn guns, whose leader explained that it was their honourable duty to protect the money by taking it into protective custody. It was not seemly, he said, that so much money should be taken in a fast car up O'Connell Street. The paymasters might lose their sense of direction and end up on an Atlantic liner in Queenstown. A tussle ensued for the golden fleece and bank notes went flying in all directions. Some shots were exchanged and one man received two bullet wounds from which he died later.

The bank manager had been given a receipt for the money taken from the bank. He was now taken to the New Barracks where he signed a receipt for the receipt which he had received for the money taken from the bank. He signed a receipt for a receipt, which was a formal procedure in banking practice.

On arrival at the New Barracks, the paymaster and his entourage were greeted with smiles of joy. There was a feeling of deep content amongst all ranks. In the days following the bank raid, the happy smiles gradually faded. The feeling of deep content was replaced by feelings of deep suspicion. No immediate payment was made to the impatient men. Their impatient murmurs provoked a statement from the paymaster-general as he now called himself. Assembled on the barrack square, the men were given a pep talk and an assurance that when the scholars had finished counting the money, due consideration would be given to all claimants.

They were reminded that as soldiers of the Republic their primary allegiance was to their country and not their pockets. Their goal should be the roll of honour amongst Ireland's glorious dead and not a roll of banknotes from the Munster & Leinster. No truly patriotic Irishman would look for money under the present difficult times.

Cowed by the noble words and shamed by the suggestion that they were not truly patriotic, the clamorous ones became silent. The timorous ones became resolute. They would continue to defend the Republic.

This raid on the Munster & Leinster Bank occurred on Tuesday, the twenty-third of May, 1922. On the same day, seven other banks in County Limerick and adjoining counties were raided. The total sum taken was around £80,000 — a large sum of money, not easy to obtain in those troubled times.

(To be continued).

WHAT ECONOMIC CRISIS?

BY JOHN CASEY

WE'VE heard it all before. Cosgrave refers to it as a "world economic recession". It is, of course, no such thing: it is a capitalists' crisis; the socialist countries are unaffected.

Cosgrave has called for a pay pause. The capitalists are in trouble and they want the workers to subsidise them. Ruairi Roberts, Fintan Kennedy, et alii, reacted as expected. No, they couldn't accept a wage freeze without a price freeze. However, they did recognise the gravity of the situation. (The "Minister for Price Increases" showed what he thought of price control when he added 4p per gallon to petrol within a week). Then we had John Carroll, a "respected" trade unionist and vice-president of the I.T.G.W.U., cooing to the Government in tune with Keating's petrol increase.

The cheek of the present Cabinet crowd is remarkable. Cosgrave called in farmers, capitalists and trade unionists but the only group told to tighten their belts were the workers' representatives. T. J. Maher, the ranchers' man, said he was pleased with the meeting; no demands had been made on the farmers and this was only as it should be as the farmers had "tightened their belts by 10% since 1973". There is no doubt that some of the smaller farmers have been having it tough since E.E.C. entry but not Maher's lads, unless the standard of cuisine in the Shelbourne has dropped. (Maybe it has. Paddy Donegan, the Minister for Defence, vomited all over the diningroom there recently but Paddy's problem seems to have been too much whiskey).

Neither did Cosgrave ask the Smurfits or the Hely Hutchinsens to flog the family silver. But to be fair, Cosgrave and his lot are the party of the ranchers and gombeen capitalists. No, the real traitors are the Labourites: the parasites who pretend to represent working class interests. Look at O'Leary, the radical of yesteryear, whose boast in the Arts Club is the amount of money he's spending these days. Then you have Mickey Mullen, a political martyr for republicanism, the opium of rural Ireland, who has no answer to growing unemployment. If Mullen and the trade union leadership were patriots they'd be drawing up a programme to fight the oncoming doomsday situation of massive

unemployment and poverty. The trade unions are the most powerful potential anti-establishment bloc in the country; the political and commercial leaders know this and have been steadily undermining organised labour.

There is scarcely a blue-collar union that has not been faced with redundancies, 3-day weeks, wage cuts, etc. This has been continuous and insidious, but carefully orchestrated. Pay-related and redundancy payments have kept the unemployed quiet and thrown cold water on the unions. But the constant succession of closures, calls for wage restraints, propoganda on the worldwide recession theme have the unions reeling. They've been softened up and are ready to toe the line. Now the Government has turned their guns on the white collar unions with a call for a wage freeze in the public sector. They may meet with more opposition here, not on ideological grounds but because the middle class like their comforts and will resent their withdrawal. These workers are also, on the whole, better educated than the blue-collar section and many of them see what's going on. Whether in a time of social upheaval they would go left or not is another question.

The trouble with the unions is Vic Featherism: the leadership is bought by the capitalists. The leaders of the British T.U.C. receive knighthoods; our lads are cuter: they stock their money in the banks and continue to wear dirty white raincoats. Like the politicians, the trade union leaders build a Mafia of loyalists around them on whom they bestow favours and on whose bought support they can count on at election and other crucial times. However, like the politicians, majority pressure can unseat them or force them to do what they're told.

The future looks rough. It looks like a repetition of the thirties: dole queues, unemployment, social unrest. Don't be fooled by the Cosgraves and the other mongrel foxes. The country is not poor. We have one of the richest lead-zinc mines in the world, vast quantities of oil and gas off the coast, good agricultural land. It is the distribution of wealth that is unfair: 12% holding 75% of the wealth, 25,000 farmers owning half the land, vast profits made by banks and building societies. The old story continues: a small clique living off the masses. But we are learning.

THE STORY OF SARAH MCGOWAN

DAYS OF THE
"BOTTOM DOG"

PART TWO

LIMERICK was a conservative city. People worked for low wages and many lived in appalling slums. Growing discontent was very often channelled into reluctant resignation. However, Sinn Fein nationalism was finding increasing expression and trade unionism was progressing slowly toward grudging acceptance in the Limerick of 1917.

The year was to be a significant one for a 17-year-old girl. She would begin a journey which was to take her from the heartbreak of home-leaving through the buildings of Brooklyn. Her story began when she was dismissed from her job for refusing to leave the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.

The employers of Limerick in 1917 were hostile to the spreading trade unionism. Long established guilds catered for the various trades, but an effort was now being made by the Connolly and Larkin-founded Transport Union to organise the unskilled labourers and women workers of the city.

Sarah McGowan was one of the many thousands of Limerick women at whom the Transport Union campaign was aimed. She was working as a printer's assistant for five shillings a week. The 17-year-old girl had to walk from John Street. Work started at 8.30 in the morning and went on until six o'clock in the evening, including Saturday.

Limerick, however, was going through a time of change. The Great War was raging throughout Europe and George's Street was filled with ragged, barefooted newspaper boys who scattered suffering through the back lanes with the latest details of death.

Going home Sarah McGowan must surely have heard those weary cries and feared for her father serving at the Front. Limerick of 1917 did little to banish her fear. On the 20th of October, however, a new cry was added to the general clamour, imploring people to buy the "Bottom Dog".

"With all our gushing, gaseous sympathy with "God's blessed poor", how small is the service we render them when all is said and done. Coal, bread, milk, butter, eggs, in this town are either unpurchasable – or unprocurable – the prices have soared so sky-high. Who cares? Who is to prevent it ...?" shouted the small labour paper.

It was a radical departure and only in retrospect could the epoch be discerned; the climate, the change, and the climax. The ordinary people survived in the midst of great events and their existence was summed up in a phrase, "growing worker awareness". And it happened in the Limerick of 1917 when the workers' paper protested about the price of food.

A rambling red brick Georgian building in Lower Glentworth Street was the focal point of this new and radical era. Known as the Mechanics' Institute, it had been founded in 1810 as an educational organisation for the workers of the city. It was here that the Limerick Trades' Council met and after a series of meetings between officials it was decided that workers needed a way whereby their demands would be articulated and cases of injustice exposed.

So in October 1917, Sarah McGowan saw the workers' paper being sold on the streets. The "Bottom Dog" had arrived. A bold strap-line across the masthead declared: "We must look at life from the point of view of the "Bottom Dog" – the oppressed – be it nation, class or sex"

It was with a cold realism that the paper was launched. In an introductory article, the long and difficult path ahead was clearly outlined. "He (the "Bottom Dog") believes in the truth of the old saying that "every dog has his day" but at the same time he must assert that the Bottom Dog's day appears to be a long way off, shrouded in the misty future. To the work at hand then – hastening the day of the Bottom Dog".

And Limerick workers did just that .. in the face of strong employer opposition to the growing labour movement, the small paper exposed cases of unnecessary hardship and at times even challenged the Church.

"One shilling and three pence to the men and £300 to the master in accord with the "Labour" of Leo XIII? Is a rack-rented room in a slum tenement and a motor car and palatial mansions", that which is just and equal", as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount?" asked the "Bottom Dog".

The chief architects of the "underground" newspaper were Trades Council secretary, Ben Dineen, a baker who lived at Mount Vincent Cottages, Rosbrien, and Council treasurer, James Casey, a printer, of Bowman Street, Limerick. The "Bottom Dog" sold for one halfpenny and was printed in secret.

Joseph P. Gleeson remembers the clandestine operation. His father had a caseroom at their home, 40, Athlunkard Street, where he helped in the hand-set type composition of the paper. Whenever possible, another printer, Tom Moloney, who lived next door, dropped in and printed off the pamphlets on a treadle machine.

By the end of October, local newspapers were able to report that "a very large number of workers – both men and women – have joined the Limerick Branch of the I.T.G.W.U."

Limerick had the appearance of a drab city at the time. Grey buildings and cold winds seemed to mirror the overcast future. The newspapers contained hope for Limerick's unemployed workers. Hope of jobs .. in England .. Wanted Immediately. 800 Labourers ... for Work in Liverpool ... Wages .. nine pence per hour.

For a few hours, however, one could escape the cold reality. The cinema was making inroads into the sodalities and the packed confraternities. There was always the pictures. "The Biggest Thing Yet In Films" declared the poster which went on the enthuse about "The Crisis". So one could become immersed in the American Civil War for four pence, eight pence, and one shilling, including the new Amusement Tax.

Sarah McGowan's mind was far from films as she went about her work at McKern's Printing Works. She was careful to avoid being caught in conversation with the other young girls, especially as Mr. Eakins, the Manager, was keeping a sharp eye on the floor. But her thoughts were not on her work. Her father had been poisoned by gas at the Front and now he was lying ill in a Birmingham hospital.

Sally, as she was known to her friends, brought home to John Street a copy of the "Limerick Chronicle" for her mother. Annie McGowan had seen hardship all her life. Her husband, Michael, was now lying in an English hospital, and there were eight young children to feed.

She may have smiled when she saw by the paper that salmon was scarce, but mackerel could still be had for fourpence. The working class women of Limerick, who had to contend with the tangible problems of poverty, were not forgotten by the "Bottom Dog" and the Trades Council also took an interest in their plight.

The November, 1917 meeting of the Limerick Trades Council waited to hear the guest speaker. Slowly he rose to his feet and began to talk about the exploited women workers of the city. "These workers must be organised", said the Rev. Fr. Richard Devane, who then extended an invitation to any of the delegates to visit St. Ita's House, Thomas Street, and see for themselves the work that was being done to uplift the social status of the girl workers of the city.

After Fr. Devane had left, the Council decided to approve of the priest's efforts to organise the female workers of the

city.

Fr. Devane was a Limerick Jesuit who from 1916 was closely associated with the Trades Council. He had organised a series of lectures on social and democratic subjects calculated "to rouse the working man from the most regrettable apathy in which he seems to be immersed at the present time".

The "Bottom Dog" was now also at work. People were being aroused and their vague understanding of the labour/capital conflict was being slowly forged. The plight of working girls in a factory was highlighted. "They get something like seven or eight shillings a week and have to work from eight 'til eight ... some nights as late as 11 or 12 o'clock".

Girls working in the dressmaking department of a city store had their cases exposed in the Labour paper. "The weekly wages of these 30 girls comes to the magnificent total of eight pounds per week .. one girl is 14 years with the firm and all she has is seven shillings a week".

"Girls must get into a trade union", declared the paper. By the end of November, 1917, the Transport Union had 600 workers in its ranks, of which 150 were women.

Trades Council secretary, Ben Dineen, the man behind the "Bottom Dog" must have been pleased with progress although there were some rumours around the city that certain employers were thinking of ways to smash the union.

The "Dog" barked back. "It is only by organising every available worker - man, woman, boy and girl - that it can ever be hoped to better their lot and give them an opportunity of earning a decent living. We will get nothing by fawning and acting the slave - cap in hand, "Please your Honour" attitude .. we have had an overdose of this in Ireland".

Alarmed at the growing strength of the trade union, employers in the city decided on counter action. Girls were threatened with dismissal if they joined, others were offered increases and more were induced to sign undertakings not to join a union.

It had been a routine morning for Sally McGowan. Hurringly she had talked to the other girls about the union and had joined on her mother's insistence. "Join the union, Sally". She could still hear the words of Annie McGowan who had lived through the Dublin Lockout of 1913. There, over 100,000 men had been refused work because they would not sign a document abjuring the Irish Transport and General Workers

Union.

The growing employer/union antagonism developed into a vicious confrontation when a wage demand for a five shilling increase was submitted on behalf of the girls to the printing firm which employed Sarah McGowan. After the demand was submitted the girls were called together by Mr. Eakins. The "Bottom Dog" reported that he offered an increase of 2/6 on condition that they left the union. If they did not leave they would get no increase and furthermore, they would be dismissed.

"Under pressure", said the paper, "eleven of the twelve girls agreed and got the 2/6 increase. One young girl, named Sarah McGowan - to her everlasting credit be it said - refused to leave the Transport Union and was therefore dismissed".

The "Bottom Dog" summed up the situation philosophically stating that the increase to the 11 girls could be stopped and they would have no union to fight their cause.

Although there was no protest about her dismissal, the episode provided Ben Dineen with the opportunity of commenting on the unscrupulous employers:

"The public must be made aware of those monuments and living exponents of the Gospel of Creed .. let every citizen know of these "Catholics" who will not pay that which will enable their employees to live in frugal comfort", thundered the "Bottom Dog" through the Christmas Streets of Limerick.

It was a cruel Christmas for Annie McGowan. Her husband still languished in a military hospital. Sally had been dismissed. And the words of Fr. Devane echoed the sentiments of a generation of workers:

"When one considers the low wage that some Limerick families have been reared on it appears a miracle how it was done".

In the New Year, Sally McGowan went to work as a waitress in a Catherine Street restaurant. But she took no further active part in trade union organisation up to her marriage and subsequent departure for New York. Throughout the city, however, women were taking up the struggle and three branches of the Transport Union were founded. Limerick workers were beginning to look outwards and take on the radical trappings of a growing labour movement.

(To be continued).

THE NEW (OLD) CITY HALL - 41 YEARS AGO

Some local people are concerned with the proposal, passed last year by the Limerick City Council, to proceed with plans to build a new City Hall. These people believe that the large sum of money to be raised for this project could be better spent on housing repairs, new houses or not spent at all.

But just in case any of these concerned citizens thinks that the key will be turned in the front door of the new City Hall next year or indeed any time in the near future, there are a few consolations to be found in the history of past plans to erect this civic building. While the proposals have now reached the scale-model stage, students of local government at work (or not at work) will recall that two other scale-models of proposed City Halls were put together in the past. After the expenditure of a considerable amount of words and money, these models were scrapped in favour of the latest one.

In the light of past experience and of the current economic recession, it is certain that the proposed site at Charlotte Quay will, like the two previous sites, remain unadorned by a City Hall for some time to come. An example of the zeal and urgency shown by City Managers and Councillors of former Corporations is provided by a "Limerick Chronicle" report in

the first week of January 1935:

The urgent need of a new City Hall for Limerick was stressed by the City Manager, Mr. J.F. Geraghty, who stated his intention of approaching the County Council to join the Corporation in erecting a building that would accommodate the staffs of both administrations. The present Town Hall had now served the purpose of civic administration for little over ninety years. The old Corporation met in the Exchange in Nicholas Street (which was now demolished some fifty years) and the reformed body decided in 1843 to occupy the present building as a Town Hall and it had remained so since then. The premises were originally known as the Commercial Buildings. They were erected in 1805 and ten years later the merchants were incorporated as a Chamber of Commerce and moved at a further date to the present building in O'Connell Street as a more central venue.

In the Limerick of that January in 1935 there were plenty of unemployed building workers available to construct the new City Hall. Forty-one years later there is little change in this aspect of the city's life.

"Buttering" the farmers

The signs have been clear for some time past that the Labour Party deputy for East Limerick, S. Coughlan, is clearing his political decks in an attempt to transfer his Dail seat to his son Thady at the next general election. The manner in which the father engineered his son's election to the City Council and to the Mayoralty was an early indication of this strategy. The stage-managing of the Herrema affair by the senior Coughlan to gain the maximum publicity for his son from the event was a further "stroke" towards the same end. Thady's election to the Administrative Council of the Labour Party was yet another move to gain credibility for the parliamentary aspirant. And in recent times the *Irish Independent's* reporter in Limerick, Noel Smith (an old Coughlan hand) has made his contribution to the "elect Thady" movement by giving front page publicity in the *Sunday Independent* on two successive weeks to highlight stories featuring Mayor Thady.

But the tale doesn't end there. Young Coughlan is now hard at work in his efforts to woo the farmers' vote in the East Limerick constituency. On December 20th, the *Farming Independent* carried as its main story a report by its *Farming Independent Reporter* of a speech made by the Mayor when he presented awards at the Annual Fat Stock Show at the City Cattle Market, Mulgrave Street.

I honestly don't know why there is so much misunderstanding between the city and rural people as there is in Limerick. But it is certainly not doing any good—or helping the area. The city people seem to be opposed to farmers and to think that they are having it too good. I would appeal to all city people to try and understand better the problems and the heartaches that the farmers have at the present time. There are many problems that they have to cope with in the E.E.C. regulations and controls, which are not always known by the city people. They hear of the dole and the many benefits that farmers get, but they know far less of the seven-day week which the farmer has to work, or the number of times that they may have to get up at night to look after livestock.

Coughlan, obviously with the general election vote in mind, added that "on every opportunity he would try to bring city and rural people closer together". He concluded by saying "that their future rested in more co-operation between all sides and this certainly included more co-operation between the city and county to clear up a lot of the 'uneasiness' that existed at the present".

In his "drop your opposition to farmers" plea, Coughlan made no effort to explore the reasons for the "uneasiness" felt by city people, especially workers, about farmers. He did not even try to bring some of his father's St. Vincent de Paul socialism to the Limerick peasantry. And, of course, he made no reference to his Party's "Outline Policy" on agriculture, adopted by the Annual Conference in January 1969. This document stated:

Land is the primary agricultural resource of this nation and must be seen to be the collective heritage of the Irish people. It must be worked and allocated in such a way to ensure the optimum return to the whole community in terms of marketable produce.

From his contacts with workers, Coughlan is well aware that the city people's attitude to farmers is something more than one of "uneasiness". The truth is that the issue is one of straightforward opposition by city workers to the preferential treatment of farmers in our society, especially in the matters of taxation and dole payments. A member of Coughlan's

Party, Barry Desmond, T.D., speaking at the Annual Delegate Conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in Killarney in 1973 revealed that farmers' incomes had risen by £140 million or 60% in the previous two years. Yet all they paid back in taxation was some £12 million in rates. This low figure is due to the fact that 75% of farmers pay no rates on their agricultural holdings!

On the other hand, wage and salary earners pay over £150 million annually in income tax, plus millions of extra pounds in rates. This situation has led to a number of blatant anomalies. For example, a farm labourer earning say £30 per week may pay over £5 a week in income tax, while his employer, the farmer, will pay no tax whatever on his farm profits.

And to add financial insult to injury, farmers' wives also enjoy tax immunity as part of the generous Government's agricultural subsidy. For instance, if a farmer's wife takes up outside employment as a teacher she is exempt from income tax, whereas a worker's wife is taxed to the hilt in even a menial part-time job.

It is a scandal that some wealthy farmers are drawing the dole, sometimes stopping off to perform this task while on the way to race meetings with their racehorses and greyhounds. And regarding "the optimum return to the whole community in terms of marketable produce", the Irish farmers fail badly to even come up to scratch. Holland, with a population of over twelve million, living in an area a little larger than Munster, manages to send big quantities of cabbage and other vegetables to this country—and this is only one example.

Capitalist rationalisation of agriculture has been much slower in Southern Ireland than in most European countries. There are still too many inefficient and lazy farmers in a country where over 30% of the entire working population are employed on the land—as against 4% in Britain. In normal capitalist society, farmers are liable for income tax—as they are in Northern Ireland and Britain. Southern Ireland, however, because of its slow industrial development, has not kept pace with the flight from the land. The farmers are organised in strong organisations and constitute a powerful political pressure group, so successive governments have allowed the no-taxation and the high dole payment policies to continue.

And so the grooming of Thady Coughlan for his father's Dail seat goes on. The whole operation has so far run fairly smoothly. But despite all Coughlan's arse-licking of the County Limerick farmers, he is unlikely to achieve very much extra in terms of their votes. With an influential and experienced farmers' man like Tom O'Donnell around, Thady will make few inroads into the rural vote. And the Limerick City workers have not been impressed by the Mayor's grovelling servility on this important issue. The one factor that the Coughlans have failed to take into consideration the the whole cynical operation is the most vital factor of all—the intelligence of the ordinary Limerick people.

THE DEATH OF SARAH MCGOWAN

As the Limerick Socialist goes to press, we have just learned of the death of Sarah McGowan, at the age of 75, in Port Jefferson, Long Island, New York. We hope our article will serve as an appreciation of her courageous gesture in standing by her trade union principles in 1918. (See story on pages 6 & 7).